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Nationalism and Nihilism: The Attitude of Two Hebrew Authors Toward Folklore

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Abstract
Folklore and literature are linked concepts, but so far no one theory has satisfactorily explained the nature of their relationship. Attempts have been made to establish the connection between them in terms of history, evolution, communication, and social systems. According to the historical approach, folklore consists of elementary forms which increase in formal and semantic complexity until they become literary genres.[1] The Chadwicks stated a generally accepted position when they wrote that "written literature was derived in some form from this 'unwritten literature'."[2] At the basis of this historical development are the dynamic laws of literature by which themes, genres, and structures advance from simple to complex patterns. Although human thoughts and emotions motivate creative writing, authors, seen in this way, are but the tools, the handmaidens of literature. The same themes repeat in different patterns, changing according to historical and social situations, yet retaining certain psychological and metaphysical elements that are as historical as they are inherent to man.

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Nationalism and Nihilism:

The Attitudes of Two Hebrew Authors Towards Folklore*

by DAN BEN-AMOS

A. FOLKLORE AND LITERATURE: FOUR APPROACHES

Folklore and literature are linked concepts, but so far no one theory has satisfactorily explained the nature of their relationship. Attempts have been made to establish the connection between them in terms of history, evolution, communication, and social systems. According to the historical approach, folklore consists of elementary forms which increase in formal and semantic complexity until they become literary genres.[1] The Chadwicks stated a generally accepted position when they wrote that "written literature was derived in some form from this 'unwritten literature'."[2] At the basis of this historical development are the dynamic laws of literature by which themes, genres, and structures advance from simple to complex patterns. Although human thoughts and emotions motivate creative writing, authors, seen in this way, are but the tools, the handmaidens of literature. The same themes repeat in different patterns, changing according to historical and social situations, yet retaining certain psychological and metaphysical elements that are as historical as they are inherent in man. These themes first appeared in ancient epics and folktales, riddles and proverbs, and now re-emerge in written poetry, prose, and drama. According to this historical approach, literature by its very nature is a recapitulation of myth and folklore.[3] Hence there is a fundamental affinity between folklore and literature: circumstances change, but the basic qualities of verbal art remain the same. Therefore modern writers are able to refer, allude, and incorporate into their works earlier oral or written literary themes and forms.

By way of contrast, from an evolutionary perspective there is a qualitative difference between folklore and literature. Folklore represents the primitive, literature the developed stages of verbal artistic expression. Archaic folklore reflects the limited mental ability of man, as yet unable to abstract and generalise. During this stage of his evolution man uses language mythopoetically, that is to say, he refers to prominent features of objects and actions, and uses them as a basis for narrative elaborations.[4] According to Cassirer, mythic thought and mythical formulation objectify the subjective human experience. Mythic thought tends toward maximal concentration and away from abstraction, comparison, and scientific analysis. Such a quality of thought is the basis upon which art and literature develop.[5] For him:

> Myth, language, and art begin as a concrete, undivided unity, which is only gradually resolved into a triad of independent modes of spiritual creativity. Consequently, the same mythic animation and hypostatization which is bestowed upon the words of human speech is originally accorded to *images,* to every kind of artistic representation. Especially in the magical realm, word magic is everywhere accompanied by picture magic. The image, too, achieves its purely representative, specifically "aesthetic" function only as the magic circle with which mythical consciousness surrounds it is

* *A Hebrew version of this article appeared in Ha-Sifrut/Literature (Tel-Aviv), 29 (1979). I would like to thank the editors for their permission to publish this English version. I would also like to thank Paula Ben-Amos, Henry Glassie, Galit Hazan-Rokem, Hagit Matras, Tikva Meroz, John Szwed, Gershom Scholem and Gideon Toury who helped in bibliographical matters and made other significant suggestions. Hagit Matras drew my attention to Brenner's article "Excursions in the World of Fable and Legend" and Tikva Meroz read the Hebrew version of the paper, offering helpful comments.*

1. See, André Jolles, *Einfache Formen* (Tübingen, 1930).
2. H. Munro and Nura Kershaw Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature* (Cambridge, 1932), I, 2.
3. See, Kenneth Burke, "Myth, Poetry and Philosophy," *Journal of American Folklore,* 73 (1960), 283-306; Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, 1957); *idem, Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York, 1963); *idem, The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976).
4. See, Malcolm Crick, *Explorations in Language and Meaning: Towards a Semantic Anthropology* (New York, 1976), 15-35; Richard M. Dorson, "The Eclipse of Solar Mythology," *Journal of American Folklore,* 68 (1955), 393-416; Max Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop,* 2nd edition (London, 1868), II, 1-146.
5. Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth,* trans. Susanne K. Langer (New York, 1946), 32-3.

broken, and it is recognised not as a mythic-magical form, but as a particular sort of *formulation.*

But although language and art both became emancipated, in this fashion, from their native soil of mythical thinking, the ideal spiritual unity of the two is reasserted upon a higher level. If language is to grow into a vehicle of thought, an expression of concepts and judgements, this evolution can be achieved only at the price of foregoing the wealth and fullness of immediate experience . . . But there is one intellectual realm in which the word not only preserves its original creative power, but is ever renewing it; in which it undergoes a sort of constant palingenesis, at once a sensuous and a spiritual reincarnation.

This regeneration is achieved as language becomes an avenue of artistic expression. Here it recovers the fullness of life; but it is no longer a life mythically bound and fettered, but an aesthetically liberated life.[6]

The evolutionary process is, hence, a transition from myth and religious beliefs to art and aesthetics. Susanne Langer elaborates on this approach and applies it to the study of literary forms:

Legends and myth and fairy tale are not in themselves literature; they are not art at all, but fantasies; as such, however, they are the natural materials of art. By their very nature they are not bound to any particular words, nor even to language, but may be told or painted, acted or danced, without suffering distortion or degradation. But literature proper is the use of language to create virtual history, or life, in the mnemonic mode — the semblance of memory, though a depersonalized memory. A legend presented as story is as new a creation as any work whereof the plot has just been invented; . . . it creates no complete and organized illusion of something lived, but is to literature what an armature or a roughly shaped block is to sculpture — a first shape, a source of ideas.[7]

Inevitably, the evolutionary perspective combines aesthetic judgement with philosophical assumptions about the development of literature. The freer a literary work is from religious beliefs, the higher is its aesthetic value. Such a standard reflects Western class and ethnocentric attitudes. Since the primordial stages of literature are extant in the verbal arts of ancient societies and contemporary non-literate peoples, and the "advanced" genres appear in literate societies, the evolutionary approach attributes to the second a higher aesthetic value than the first.

From the perspectives of communication, the differing qualities of folklore and literature are dependent upon purely technical developments rather than on any cognitive, religious or aesthetic evaluation. However, these developments can effect the crucial qualities of literary expression. The formation of genres, structures, and styles is dependent upon the medium of communication, whether it is written or oral. Thus, what at first glance appears to be only an external and technical feature becomes, from a communicative perspective, a crucial factor that determines the literary qualities of verbal art. Yet this approach does not value technical sophistication of any kind, and it remains essentially relative, considering folklore and literature as related but different verbal arts.[8] Within literary studies folklore and literature often appear as two components of a comprehensive system. They are considered as *Volksliteratur* and *Hochliteratur,*[9] respectively, thus projecting the hierarchy of social class into the verbal arts. Although this ranking is asserted on the basis of social order alone, it also inevitably involves an aesthetic judgement in which folklore receives the negative response. In order to resolve this problem literary scholars have endeavoured to separate evaluation from description, so that the entire literary activity of a heterogeneous society might be considered as a system or multi-system.[10] So far, most of their discussions have dealt primarily with the relationship between art literature and popular literature, but it is possible to extend them to folklore. In these terms folklore and literature are two systems of verbal art which co-exist in time and space, but which are employed by different social classes. The mediation between them takes place either through literary contact or through the activities of cultural mediators

6. *Ibid.*, 98.
7. Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in A New Key* (London, 1953), 274.

8. See, Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge, 1977); Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), Harold A. Innis, *Empire and Communications,* revised by Mary Q. Innis (Toronto, 1972); Walter J. Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology: Studies in the Interpretation of Expression and Culture* (Ithaca, 1971); *idem, The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven, 1967).
9. Max Lüthi, *Volksliteratur und Hochliteratur: Menschenbild-Thematik-Formstreben* (Bern and Munich, 1970).

who either belong to two social groups simultaneously or move between them.[11]

B. THE ATTITUDES OF AUTHORS TO FOLKLORE

No doubt, these theories articulate different aspects of the relationship between folklore and literature. But they present the issues by focusing upon the relationship between two abstract concepts, while ignoring the very social and historical reality which these theories try to explain. An exploration of the relationship between literature and folklore should rather examine the social and historic dynamics in which they exist. That is to say, prior to the formulation of any abstract ideas about the subject, it is necessary to explore the actual attitudes of writers to oral literature. These attitudes constitute a variable element which is dependent upon biography, historical conditions, and intellectual trends in a particular society or period. Naturally, cultural-social ideas about the concept of folklore occupy an important position here.

Varying attempts to evaluate the genres of folklore preceded even the coining of the term "folklore" in 1846. Natalie Davis, for example, has examined the changing attitudes of French intelligentsia to folk proverbs from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, the threshold of the romantic period. She points out that "in the sixteenth century . . . learned interest in proverbs intensified in a way that would not be seen again in Europe until the romantic national movements of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; and the collectors were not just modest clerics but often important humanists."[12] In contrast, "in the seventeenth century, . . . learned attitudes toward 'the people' became more critical, and interest in the stylistic potential of the proverb form began to wane. The authority of old and vulgar sayings could hardly be compelling to enlightened Libertines with their contempt for foolish tales, to Cartesian rationalists, or to any other opponents of 'superstition' and credulity."[13]

In the history of ideas, unlike the history of wars, it is difficult to date precisely the appearance of an idea or the change that occurred in a concept. Nevertheless, it is possible to see the publication of Vico's *Principi di una Scienza Nuova* in 1725 as a turning-point in the attitude towards folktales and folksongs. Previously these genres were thought to be mere fictive narratives, with neither meaning nor reason; afterwards people began to see them as an expression of the "national spirit". In his search for "the true Homer", Vico, as he allegorized historical legends, suggested [14] "that the reason why the Greek peoples vied with each other for the honour of being his fatherland, and why al-

10. See, Boris M. Ejxenbaum, "Literary Environment," in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, eds. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyne Pomorska (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), 56-65; Itamar Even-Zohar, *Papers in Historical Poetics*, Papers on Poetics and Semiotics 8 (Tel Aviv, 1978); Claudio Guillén, *Literature as System: Essays toward the Theory of Literary History* (Princeton, 1971); Roman Jakobson and Peter Bogatyrev, "On the Boundary between Studies of Folklore and Literature," in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, eds. Ladislav Matejka and Krynsyna Pomorska (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), 91-3; Helmut Kreuzer, "Trivialliteratur als Forschungsproblem: zur Kritik des deutschen Trivialromans seit der Aufklärung," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Giestesgeschichte* 41 (1967), 173-91; Leo Lowenthal, *Literature, Popular Culture, and Society* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1961); Gideon Toury, "Literature as a Polysystem," *Ha-Sifrut* 18-19 (1974), 1-19 (in Hebrew); Jurij Tynjaniv, "On Literary Evolution," in *Readings in Russian Poetics, op.cit.* 66-78.

11. The documentation of folklore in literature is a separate problem. Richard M. Dorson has formulated standards by which it would be possible to evaluate the validity of folklore in literature in his article "The Identification of Folklore in American Literature," *Journal of American Folklore*, 70 (1957), 1-9. The disagreement between him and Daniel Hoffman results from differences in their aims. While in his essay "Folklore and Literature: Notes Toward a Theory of Interpretation," *Journal of American Folklore*, 70 (1957), 15-24, Hoffman wishes to underscore the folkloric qualities in literature, Dorson examines literature as an historical document of folklore. Such an examination has certainly an empirical value in so far as it establishes the extent of the author's exposure to folklore. In addition, however, the acid test that Dorson proposes for literature in order to evaluate its folkloric content has also theoretical value, and it is unfortunate that current scholars who deal with sociological aspects of literature, such as Jeffrey L. Sammons, *Literary Sociology and Practical Criticism: An Inquiry* (Bloomington, 1977), are not familiar with Dorson's argument. It is possible to infer from Dorson's discussion and description that authors who have had direct contact with folklore performances and described them in their writings, have had only a local readership and have not attained national reputation. This fact remains unchanged even if, later on, literary critics discover them and re-evaluate their aesthetic judgement of the writings of such authors. Dorson points out some cases of such a change in his article "Folklore and Literature", *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, 13 (1976), 327-9.

The scholarship that resulted in the Parry-Lord hypothesis represents another direction in the documentation of the contact between folklore and literature. Many of these works are listed in Edward R. Haymes, *A Bibliography of Studies Relating to Parry's and Lord's Oral Theory* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973). This textual research is based on the assumption that the formula is the sole means of folkloric performance. Hence the discovery of formulas in literary works will provide ultimate proof of their folk origins. For a critic of this approach see, Ruth Finnegan, "What is Oral Literature Anyway? Comments in the Light of Some African and Other Comparative Material," in *Oral Literature and the Formula*, eds. Benjamin A. Stolz and Richard S. Shannon (Ann Arbor, 1976), 127-76.

12. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, 1975), 233.

13. *Ibid.*, 245-246.

14. See, David Birney, "Vico's New Science of Myth," in *Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium*, eds. Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Hayden V. White (Baltimore, 1969), 259-78.

most all claimed him as citizen, is that the Greek peoples were themselves Homer."[15] According to Vico, the Greek nation is the true and original author of the Homeric epics. This notion radically changed the conceptual value of folktales. They ceased to be an expression of ignorance and illiteracy and became a symbol of the national spirit. The same simplicity of expression, coarseness of style and imagination, lack of common sense and consistency, that had previously reflected negatively on folk-literature, became marks of excellence because they expressed the collective creativity of the "folk". Vico's influence was substantial and his treatise proposed a new science of society.[16] During the nineteenth century folktales and folksongs played a central political role in the emergence of national movements and literature.[17] And within intellectual and academic circles, these forms became part of the science of folklore, a separate research discipline.

But this very development changed the concept of folklore, particularly among writers with nationalistic interests. The idea of folklore, not just folktales and folksongs, became a central component in the concept of nationhood; folk culture, with its assumed and real antiquity and rural character, was transformed into a national symbol. The urban intelligentsia still condemned ignorance and poverty; they continued to regard them as negative factors in society. But the transformation of peasant life into a romantic symbol created a new frame of reference for intellectual attitudes towards rural reality. Thinkers and writers began to relate to peasants in terms of their romantic ideology, rather than the reality which they could directly observe. They symbolized "folk life" and consequently became even more alienated and detached from the very subject of that symbol. In other words, for these writers, the reality of "folk life" was hidden by the symbol they had created from it. In addition, the discipline of folklore itself became an element of alienation that detached the scholar from his research. The individual lost his significance and became nothing but an example for a principle, a private case of a general rule.

The duality that has characterised the attitude towards folklore, as both symbol and reality, has had an historical dimension, that is, it reflects the attitudes of different writers, who belong to different generations, towards the concept of folklore. The confrontation between William Butler Yeats and James Joyce dramatically illustrates such an historical shift in the attitude towards folklore. While Yeats treated folklore as an expression of the Irish national spirit, Joyce looked for direct contact between literature and life. For him the idea of folklore was a barrier to be removed or overcome. As a leader of the Irish renaissance, Yeats edited folktales and legends that he had selected from earlier collections.[18] For him they represented the essence of the Irish national spirit and he incorporated them in his poetic and dramatic writings. In 1902 when Yeats was thirty-seven and Joyce twenty years old, they met for the first and only time. According to Yeats' description, his own attitude to folklore served as a target for Joyce's criticism. After Yeats describes Joyce reading his poems, he writes:

> I praised his work but he said, "I really don't care whether you like what I am doing or not. It won't make the least difference to me. Indeed I don't know why I am reading to you."
>
> Then, putting down his book, he began to explain all his objections to everything I had ever done. Why had I concerned myself with politics, with folklore, with the historical setting of events and so on. . . .
>
> I had been doing some little plays for our Irish theatre, and had founded them all on emotions or stories that I had got out of folklore. He objected to these particularly and told me that I was deteriorating. I had told him that I had written these plays quite easily and he said that made it quite certain, his own little book owed nothing to anything but his own mind which was much nearer to God than folklore.[19]

While the subject of this confrontation was the poet's creative powers, it focused on folk-

15. Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (New York, 1961), 270.
16. See, Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas* (New York, 1976); Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Hayden V. White, eds. *Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium*, (Baltimore, 1969); Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Donald Philip Verene, eds. *Giambattista Vico's Science of Humanities* (Baltimore, 1976).
17. See, for example William A. Wilson, *Folklore and Nationalism in Modern Finland* (Bloomington, 1976).
18. William B. Yeats, *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (London, 1888); *idem, Irish Fairy Tales* (London, 1892); *idem, Irish Folk Stories and Fairy Tales*, (New York, n.d.). For a discussion of Yeats and his relation to folklore see Edward Hirsch, *Wisdom and Power: Yeats and the Commonwealth of Faery*, unpublished thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1979.
19. Quoted in Richard Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats*, 2nd edition (New York, 1964), 86-7.

lore. Joyce, if we can interpret his attitude in retrospect, did not object to the incorporation of folklore into literature *per se*; he was himself to do this later.[20] He was however opposed to the generalisations implicit in such a usage, i.e. to the transformation of folklore into a symbol of the Irish national spirit.

In the mid-twentieth century it is the attitude of Joyce rather than of Yeats that has prevailed. With the establishment of folklore research and increased public awareness of its symbolic meaning, a few writers specifically rejected the symbolisation of rural reality. The poet Patrick Kavanagh, for example, opposed turning village life into the "cute"; for him, this very process, generated by valuation and admiration, reflected alienation. In his poem "The Great Hunger" he describes the desires, the loneliness and the agony of Patrick Maguire, whom the world sees as a mere symbol:

The world looks on
And talks of the peasant:
The peasant has no worries;
In his little lyrical fields
He ploughs and sows;
He eats fresh food,
He loves fresh women,
He is his own master
As it was in the Beginning
The simpleness of peasant life.
The birds that sing for him are eternal choirs,
Everywhere he walks there are flowers.
His heart is pure,
His mind is clear,
He can talk to God as Moses and Isaiah talked –
The peasant who is only one remove from the beasts he drives.
The travellers stop their cars to gape over the green bank
Into his fields.

There is the source from which all cultures rise,
And all religions,
There is the pool in which the poet dips
And the musician.
Without the peasant base civilization must die,
Unless the clay is in the mouth the singer's singing is useless.
The travellers touch the roots of the grass and feel renewed
When they grasp the steering wheels again.
The peasant is the unspoiled child of Prophecy.
The peasant is all virtues – let us salute him without irony
The peasant ploughman who is half a vegetable –
Who can react to sun and rain and sometimes even
Regret that the Maker of Light had not touched him more intensely.[21]

In this section Kavanagh directs his caustic verses not only towards literature, but towards the entire urban population, and all those who see the peasant through the glasses of nineteenth-century folklore and anthropological theory. For him, their ideas erect a fence around reality. They turn the urban onlooker and romantic author into intellectual tourists who admire their own ideas and observe a scene and yet are incapable of sensing the pulse of reality.

C. TWO HEBREW AUTHORS' ATTITUDES TOWARD FOLKLORE

At the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Hebrew authors in Eastern Europe had no Hebrew peasant that they could admire and transform into a national symbol. Their relationship with folklore was riddled with ambivalent attitudes that varied and changed both historically and geographically. The contrasting models which folklore and the Zionist movement drew on were a source of their frustration. While folklore relates to contemporary peasant life, Hebrew nationalism turned to Old Testament figures and stories for models to emulate. The Jewish folklife and literature of Eastern Europe symbolised the exile and decline from which Zionism sought to depart. Even writing in the Hebrew language was, for these authors, a symbolic act that manifested a separation between the language of the "folk" and the ideal, revived language of the nation. This literary revolution was to have a decisive effect on the development of Hebrew language and literature.[22]

20. See, Alan Dundes, "The Study of Folklore in Literature and Culture: Identification and Interpretation," *Journal of American Folklore*, 78 (1965), 136-42; Don Gifford and Robert J. Seidman, *Notes for Joyce: An Annotation of James Joyce's Ulysses* (New York, 1974), 543, 549-57.

21. Patrick Kavanagh, *The Great Hunger*, (Dublin, 1942), 28-9.

22. See, Itamar Even-Zohar, "The Nature and Functionalization of the Language of Literature under Diglossia," *Hasifrut*, 2 (1970), 286-302, (in Hebrew).

At first the Zionist concept of nationalism left only one option open to writers searching for the Jewish national spirit: they had to draw on the language, themes, and personalities of the Old Testament, which possessed the same symbolic value that peasants and their songs held for writers of other European nations. East-European Jewish folklore was at first rejected as embodying the spirit of exile. Later, at the beginning of the twentieth century, some writers, especially those with romantic tendencies, changed their attitude and began to admire contemporary Jewish folklore, allowing their newly-found romanticism the upper hand over Zionist ideology.

The transition to Eretz-Israel (Palestine) changed authors' attitudes to folklore. The return to their new, yet ancient, territory meant that writers could restore folklore to the position it had occupied in other national movements and it could become symbolic of the national spirit, even in Zionism – albeit, instead of reflecting past customs and manners, it became a symbol for future aspirations. Its very formulation in Eretz-Israel would demonstrate the success of national movements, and in turn, the crystallisation of Hebrew folklore would provide an important basis for the emergence of literature.

a) *Folklore and Nationalism: Joseph Hayyim Brenner.* One of the writers who expressed these views was Joseph Hayyim Brenner (1881-1921). He was one of the most important Hebrew writers active during the first two decades of the twentieth century. In 1904 he came to London after deserting from the Russian army, and in 1909 he immigrated to Eretz-Israel. There he was active both as author and editor, becoming influential among Hebrew writers and the growing Jewish community.[23] It was his belief that literature must reflect and express the dynamic processes and languages of reality; therefore, as part of reality, folklore should be an integral part of literature. Writers who cannot use the spoken languages, and all that they signify, in their writings, are missing a significant portion of the life they presume to describe. The absence of Hebrew folklore was, thus, a shortcoming in literature. In the "Preface" to a survey article on folklore entitled "Excursions in the World of Fable and Legend" that first appeared in the periodical *Ha-Ahdut* in 1914, he expressed his views on the role of folklore in literature, criticising at the same time the literary approaches of Ahad Ha-Am (1856-1927), a leading ideologist of the Zionist movement.[24]

> Only a logical and rational scholar, such as Ahad Ha-Am is, only an author whose attitude toward life is more often mechanistic than organic, only a man for whom the hidden depth and the basic instincts of the human soul are foreign – only he could express pleasure and satisfaction at the absence from our Hebrew literature of "bawdy and dirty songs", "which are full of nonsense" like the Yiddish folksongs. [Our literature] is, thank God, wholly of wisdom, holiness, learning and eternity. I cannot recall exactly, word for word, the phrases in that article about "Rival Tongues" *[Riv ha-leshonot]*,[25] but I do clearly remember the utter contempt for our folk poetry in the spoken language of our people. It is important to point out to what extent such a writer, who has great confidence in the eternity of Israel, and great trust in himself and his opinions, did not grasp that had it only been in the realm of possibilities that in our Hebrew literature there would be a little bit of *folklore* [emphasised in the original], a little bit of poetry of folk fables and legends, in the spoken language of the people, it would have provided the literature with a firmer, stronger and everlasting foundation greater than three books like the *Guide of the Perplexed of the Time*,[26] and would have added to literature more strength, force, and vitality than all the four volumes of *At the Cross-Roads*[27] put together.[28]

After Brenner had stated the significance of folklore for Hebrew literature in general, he

23. An English translation of his major novel is *Breakdown and Bereavement*, trans. Hillel Halkin (Ithaca, 1971).
There is an extensive literature about Brenner in Hebrew. A biographical study is Yitzhak Baron, *The Young Brenner*, 2 vols. (Tel Aviv, 1975).

24. For a selection of his writings and studies about him see, Leon Simon, ed. and trans., *Ahad Ha-Am, Essays, Letters, Memoirs* (Oxford, 1946); *idem, Ahad Ha-Am Asher Ginzberg: A Biography* (Philadelphia, 1912); Norman Bentwich, *Ahad Ha'Am and his Philosophy* (Jerusalem, 1927).

25. Translated and published in Leon Simon, ed., *Ahad Ha-Am, Essays*, 222-30.

26. A major work in Jewish philosophy by Nachman Krochmal (1785-1840), published posthumously in 1851. For an analysis of Krochmal's philosophy see Julius Guttmann, *Philosophies of Judaism* (New York, 1964), 365-91; Nathan Rotenstreich, *Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times* (New York, 1968), 136-48.

27. Ahad Ha-Am's collected essays published in Hebrew as *Al Parashat Derakhim* ("At the Crossroads"), 4 vols. (Warsaw, 1904).

28. J.H. Brenner, "Mi-Tokh ha-Pinkas: 16" ("From the Notebook: 16"), *Kol Kitvei J.H. Brenner* ("Collected Works of J.H. Brenner") (Tel Aviv, 1937), VIII, 262.

addressed himself specifically to the question of Hebrew literature in Eretz-Israel and its future relationship with folklore.

> The better Hebrew writers cannot bask in Ahad Ha-Am's contempt; the better Hebrew writers who today write in Hebrew, only because they do not want to add another glaring rift to their otherwise torn lives by writing in many languages; in their hearts they nevertheless know their own tragedy, the tragedy of writing in a non-spoken language. The possibility that one of these days a natural Hebrew folklore will be born is but a golden dream that is far removed from them. It is with great envy, and with full awareness of their tragedy, the tragedy of Hebrew literature, that they view even such collections that are devoted to this subject as those Mr. Noah Prilutski publishes in Warsaw in spoken Yiddish.[29] But if we do not have folklore in the full sense of the word, and it is impossible that we shall have it in the near future, even if the Hebrew language will progress in Eretz-Israel more than it has to date . . . if we are still missing a folk poetry that emerges from the depth of the people, outlining directions for conscious creation that ensue, even if inevitably we are completely lacking such poetry, . . . and this is a lack that cannot be filled . . . we still have fables and legends in the folk spirit. These are fables and legends that were created, told and preserved from generation to generation by the learned people in the nation. We had them almost always throughout the many periods of our literature in the holy language.[30]

In this preface, Brenner discusses two distinct, albeit related, problems. On the one hand he treats Hebrew folklore as a Utopian idea, "a golden dream". For him, folklore has symbolic value as part of the Jewish aspirations for national revival. On the other hand, he regards folklore as a verbal expression which is an integral part of reality, and hence a contributory factor in the creation of dynamic literature. Literature would benefit aesthetically from direct contact with folksongs, folktales and their language; their absence is a serious shortcoming that effects the quality of literature. From this perspective Brenner does not approach folklore as an idea but as an important basis for literary creativity, without which a writer cannot adequately describe reality. Folk proverbs and speech are tools that enable an author to capture and describe social life. Their absence from Hebrew literature illustrates the lack of cohesive social life in Eretz-Israel. Even when Brenner relates to folklore as material for literature, he is aware of its symbolic value in the Jewish national revival. For him the future existence of folklore will mark the formation of a Hebrew society that will have finally evolved its own cultural and linguistic identity.

In his "Preface" Brenner discusses the idea of folklore; the body of the article "Excursions in the World of Fable and Legend" deals in a popular manner with the science of folklore. Since every survey is inevitably selective, his choice of themes indicates his own view of folklore as a science. None of his ideas are startling in their novelty, but his familiarity with the subject and its major issues is amazing. Brenner emphasises the universality of folklore, surveying the distribution of themes and motifs among different peoples. He points out that diffusion occurs through personal contact and interaction between merchants and government officials, who serve as inter-cultural brokers. At the same time, he does not neglect the national aspect of folklore. Particular themes develop their unique local and national features through error, subconscious modifications, or by adaptation to traditional cultural patterns. Brenner is aware of the theoretical conflict that exists between the nationalistic tendencies of folklore scholars and their research findings that demonstrate the universal distribution of themes. He emphasises the archaic elements in folk literature, which he sees as survivals retained by modern educated society. For him these survivals reflect ancient art and belief. On the one hand they demonstrate the irrationality of modern man; on the other, the rationality of primitive man who sought answers to cosmic questions in myth. Although thematic diffusion features prominently in this article, Brenner demonstrates awareness of the polygenetic theory of folktale origins, which he correctly labels the anthropological approach.

The article provides popular information. But thanks to Brenner's importance as a Hebrew author, its significance extends beyond the information it conveys. The essay reflects his ideas about the nature of the

29. Noah Prilutski (1882-1941); for bibliographical references to his publications in folklore see, Uriel and Beatrice Weinreich, *Yiddish Language and Folklore: A Selective Bibliography for Research*, (The Hague, 1959).
30. Brenner, 263.

folklore that he foresaw would emerge in Eretz-Israel. His expectations are realistic and well balanced, and at the same time agree with the assumptions of the Hebrew national renaissance. Brenner assumes that Hebrew folklore will include survivals from earlier evolutionary stages and from previous historical periods, as well as elements borrowed from other nations. The formation of Jewish Hebrew folklore as a process is prolonged yet an object of constant striving. Once formed, its influence on writers will be positive.

For Brenner, not only would the end results of folklore have positive effects, the very act of field research would constitute a constructive influence on the community. He illustrates this point with an example of a scholar's involvement with the people whom he studied, and his contribution to the revival of a tradition:

> Once the noted Egyptologist Maspero[31] told a group of elementary school teachers in Egypt the story of The Two Brothers[32] that had been discovered in an ancient papyrus about three thousand years old. As it turned out the Egyptians had long forgotten this legend; but once they heard it from Maspero, they kept telling it to their pupils, who in turn told it to their parents. And so it came about that today Egyptian peasants are telling each other a story that their forefathers told three thousand years ago, which had been diffused to other peoples in different versions, but had been forgotten in its birthplace.[33]

Brenner cites this anecdote as an illustration of the way modern life could contribute to narrative diffusion and revival. As we shall see, the central issue implicit in this story, the relationship between scholar and tradition, will serve as the focal point in Agnon's attitude towards folklore and he will consider it from a philosophical transcendental perspective.

b) *Folklore and Nihilism: Shmuel Yosef Agnon.* Agnon (1888-1970), the winner of the 1966 Nobel Prize for Literature, is one of the most important modern Hebrew authors.[34] In his youth he formed a friendship with Brenner, who encouraged the younger writer because he thought his literary talent was promising.[35] Personal relationship and mutual literary esteem notwithstanding, they differed in their narrative methods and literary attitudes towards folklore. More significantly, thirty or forty years after Brenner's death, his vision of an indigenous Hebrew folklore had not been fulfilled. Theoretically at least, apart from using folklore for literary purposes, Agnon could have seen the formation of Hebrew folklore as symbolic of the national spirit in Eretz-Israel, and the latter State of Israel. In practice, however, he interspersed his short stories and novels with East European Jewish, rather than Israeli and Hebrew folklore. For him the concept of folklore is not a symbol of nationalism, but of social crisis, collapse of tradition, alienation, and the social alienation of modern man. The transformation of tradition into an object of research epitomises, for him, the complete loss of any cultural foundation. Unlike Brenner, Agnon sees himself as a writer who draws on folk sources. In his literary writings he often retells Hasidic and other Jewish folktales; his narratives are full of allusions to traditional Jewish themes, either from East European or early Haggadic folk literature. In many cases the narrative tension is not clear without reference to the folktales implicit in the short stories. From the outset, literary critics identified Agnon with his folk themes. For example, P. Lachower described his first book (published by Brenner in 1912), *Ve-Hayah He Akov Le-Mishor* ("And the Rugged Shall be Made Level"), as "a complete folk narrative,"[36] and later he entitled his review "The Folk Narrator."[37] Other literary critics discussed Agnon's

31. Gaston Maspero (1846-1916) was a leading nineteenth-century Egyptologist. See his, *Popular Stories of Ancient Egypt*, trans. A.S. Johns (1915: New York, 1967).
32. Tale type 318 "The Faithless Wife." For English translations of the Egyptian text see Maspero, 1-20; William Kelly Simpson, ed., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, 1972), 92-107; Miriam Luchtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings* (Berkeley, 1976), II, 203-11.
33. Quoted from J.H. Brenner, *Kol Kitvei J.H. Brenner* ("Collected Works of J.H. Brenner") (Tel Aviv, 1967), III, 454.

34. For studies in English about Agnon see, Arnold J. Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare: A Study of the Fiction of S.Y. Agnon* (Berkeley, 1968); Harold Fisch, *S.Y. Agnon* (New York, 1975).
35. See S.Y. Agnon, "The Life and Death of J.H. Brenner," *Molad* 9 (1961); reprinted in *idem, Me-Atzmi el Atzmi*, "From Myself to Myself," (Jerusalem, 1976), 11-141; *idem*, "Temol Shilshom" ("Days Gone By"), *Collected Works of S.Y. Agnon* (Jerusalem, 1959), V, 391; R. Weiser, "S.Y. Agnon's Letters to J.H. Brenner," *S.Y. Agnon: Studies and Documents*, eds. G. Shaked and R. Weiser (Jerusalem, 1978), 39-56.
36. P. Lachover, "Ve-Haya He-Akov Le-Mishor," *Ha-Tsfira*, 38, No. 175 (1912), 3 (in Hebrew). For a recent comparison between this story and its possible Yiddish source, see Sarah Halperin, "A Comparative Study of Agnon's 'And the Crooked Shall Become Straight' and its Supposed Yiddish Source," *Newsletter: World Union of Jewish Studies*, 16, (1980), 13-23 (In Hebrew, with a summary in English).

relationship with folktales and searched for motifs and customs in his stories.[38] Agnon himself was aware of his public image as an author who resorts to folk traditions, and he wrote the following in an "Apology" that appeared at the end of his collection of short stories, *The Fire and the Wood:*

> Let me state here something about myself. It is a trial for a narrator who can describe things he has witnessed, telling Hasidic folktales and the like. But I rely on those individuals who will be able to tell the difference between my stories and those that everyone else is writing.[39]

Space does not permit the exploration of Agnon's complex attitudes towards folklore and the complicated literary uses to which he puts tradition. These topics require a special study. But we may note that the more Agnon uses folk narrative and oral tradition, the more cynical his attitude to folklore and folklore scholars becomes. The following conversation occurs in his novel *Shira* after Agnon has described Taglicht, one of the characters, telling fables:

> Herbest and Weltfremd sat and wondered for a while which is the fable and which is the moral. Suddenly, Weltfremd jumped up, hugged Taglicht and said, "You are good enough to eat. I would give a thousand years of my life to anyone who would go and tell scholars that their books are written exactly like the parables of that preacher; evidence is piled on top of evidence, and the latter is worth no more than the former. Dear Taglicht, you are a treasure. On every single subject, you have something to say that is better than the topic that is talked about. I would exchange all our folklorists for one of your small parables. Taglicht, you should write your own words in a book. I am sure it would be a good book, and I'll find good things in it." Taglicht said, "Where we lived in Galicia people used to say 'A mere pharmacist is a fool'." Weltfremd said, "I suppose you mentioned a pharmacist because you can say something about him. Well, where you lived in Galicia people used to say 'A mere pharmacist is a fool,' why?" Taglicht said, "A man who spent so many years at the university and at the end of it all is content with a pharmaceutical job and did not study medicine, is he not a fool? So is this folklorist who has so much material, and is content to make it a subject of folklore study, and does not create a story from it . . . " Weltfremd said, "If this is the case, why do you not write short stories?" Taglicht said, "For the same reason that philosophy professors cannot be philosophers."[40]

It is possible to infer Agnon's positive attitude toward folklore from his ridicule. As his personal example demonstrates, Agnon prefers literary involvement in folktales and their integration into the world created by the author. In that sense his approach complements Brenner's ideas about the contribution that folklore can make to literature. However, unlike Brenner, Agnon assumes a confrontation between writers and scholars. Writers continue tradition, whereas scholars record it and in doing so sap its vitality.[41]

Agnon's sarcastic attitude towards the scholar and tale collector is not accidental; it also appears in a distinctly satirical work. In *The Book of the State* he turns the folklorist, the joke collector, into a parody of himself, and he becomes a joke collector whose actions are nothing but a joke:

37. *Idem*, "Mesaper Ha-Am," *Ha-Aretz* (8.12. 1938). The image of a "folk-narrator" has become so engrained in the consciousness of critics and readers that they occasionally suggest he adopted from folk tradition narrative episodes he actually authored. See, David Tamar, "Two Letters from Agnon," *Yediot Akhronot* (2129180), 23 (In Hebrew).

38. Arnold Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare*, 93-125; Isaac Ganuz, "The Folk Motifs in 'Edo and Enam' by S.Y. Agnon and the Critical Interpretations of the Story," *Yeda 'Am*, 18, No. 43-4 (1977), 77-86; Jacob Herbert Wilner, *Folk-Lore in the Writings of Agnon: An Analysis of Jewish Customs, Ceremonies, and Superstitions in the Works of Samuel Joseph Agnon*, unpublished thesis (New York, 1939).

39. S.Y. Agnon, "Ha-Esh ve-ha-Etzim' ("The Fire and the Wood"), *Collected Works of S.Y. Agnon*, vol. 8 (Jerusalem, 1962), 336.

40. *Idem*, *Shira* (Jerusalem, 1971), 315-6.

41. For a discussion of Agnon's attitude to scholars and research see, Gabriel Moked, "Transcendence, Art and Scientific Research in Two Symbolic Tales: *Edo and Enam* and *Al Olam*," *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1977), III, 176-7 (in Hebrew); Gershon Shaked, *The Narrative Art of S.Y. Agnon* (Tel Aviv, 1973), 283-9 (in Hebrew). In reply to my inquiry Gershom Scholem wrote that "Agnon's negative attitude toward folklore did not prevent him from following the publications of Jewish folklore scholars with great interest." He did not "deny" the actual significance of folklore, only what he called the ignorance and superficialities of those who dealt with the subject (3/12/1979). Yeats was also critical of folklore scholarship, but for different reasons. He wrote in the "Introduction" to *Irish Folk Stories and Fairy Tales* (xv) that "the various collectors of Irish folk-lore have, from our point of view, one great merit, and from the point of view of others, one great fault. They have made their work literature rather than science, and told us of the Irish peasantry rather than of the primitive religion of mankind, or whatever else the folk-lorists are on the gad after. To be considered scientists they should have tabulated all their tales in forms of grocers' bills – item the fairy king, item the queen. Instead of this they have caught the very voice of the people, the very pulse of life, each giving what was the most noticed in his day."

A committee was appointed and came to the treasurer. The treasurer was a joke collector and he knew there was no-one who could not tell a joke; and if he could not, this in itself was funny. He welcomed the committee members as though they were bringing him a collection of jokes. He, too, told them a few anecdotes, explaining which one had a pedigree and which was a bastard, illegitimate, or a foundling. Moving from one joke to another, he began to discuss the nature of humour . . .

So the treasurer was sitting with the committee members, exchanging pleasantries and jokes. He did not omit any of the great statesmen nor did he tell one of those jokes that the citizens like to recount about them. He said, "I suppose these jokes will commemorate the memory of our friends more than their deeds, even though their actions are nothing but a big joke."[42]

Indirectly Agnon ridicules folklore research methods and collecting, classification, and the search for historical origins. His satire is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, he turns the discussion of serious economic problems into a joke session, which mocks the incompetence of bureaucrats. On the other hand, folklore research itself becomes the butt of the satire, since it is unsuitable for appreciating the importance of the occasion. There is no room for folklore in such circumstances and it can only be a substitute for serious discussion, a rhetorical means of avoiding a difficult situation and its consequences.

Agnon is often interested in folklore research methods. He introduces the subject in another story with allegorical touches, although in this case his approach is not satirical but substantive and descriptive. He writes in his story "Within the Wall":

Once on Sabbath Eve, a researcher attached himself to me. He collected all kinds of melodies, chants, and songs throughout the countries and localities of the Near East. He was distressed when we left the synagogue. Finally he said to me, "I have ten thousand recordings of all the prayers of all the people. I have heard many prayers and songs, but never have I heard a sweeter, holier prayer than this." And he added, "I would give him ten pounds of Eretz-Israel so that I can record any prayer he wishes."

After the Sabbath I went to Rabbi Abraham Hayyim to bring him the good news. When I arrived at his home, I could not see him because he was living in a dark house. When he saw me, he asked me to sit on a broken bed. I told him that in five minutes he could earn what he makes in ten months praying three prayers every day, and four prayers on those days when *Mussaf* [an additional prayer] is required. He answered me, "I cannot." I said to him, "What do you mean 'I cannot'? Is there any prohibition in such a matter?" He said to me, "I do not have a melodious voice." He realised that I was surprised and said, "When I approach the ark, the Holy One, Blessed be He, endows me with a melodious voice and I pray before him."[43]

There are parallels to such a conception of singing ability in ethnographic literature. Priests or singers pray or sing in a trance and attribute their music to supernatural power. But an examination of this paragraph with special reference to Agnon's general attitude to folklore brings out not its ethnographic accuracy, but more pointedly, his rejection of scientific research. He is opposed to collection as a mode of comprehension. The foreign scholar sees the prayers only in terms of their artistic quality while the cantor experiences religious inspiration. The collector himself becomes a catalyst in the process of the transformation of myth into art discussed by Cassirer.[44] From the point of view of society itself, the researcher is a negative and destructive element who, by his very presence and actions, shakes the foundations of religious belief and wrecks traditional culture. He is unable to comprehend the multiplicity of meaning in either the prayer or its melody, and relates only to their musical value. The profound meanings of prayers are obscured for him; he can be sensitive only to the aesthetic, and from a religious point of view, superficial aspects of the service.

Implicit in this description is a severe indictment of folklore research. The student of culture is a foreign observer, a scientific tourist, equipped with objective research concepts and tools that render sterile his attitude towards the reality he examines. His very outlook on life dooms him to failure. He is an alien among the cultural values that he

42. S.Y. Agnon, "Chapters from The Book of the State" in "Samukh ve-Nireh," *Collected Works of S.Y. Agnon*, vol. 6 (Jerusalem, 1959), 278.

43. *Idem*, *Li-Fnim min ha-Khoma* ("Within the Wall") (Jerusalem, 1975), 32.
44. Cassirer, *op.cit.*

studies; his own scientific frame of reference prevents him from fully understanding others. Stylistically, the use of the phrase "the Near East" in this context clearly reflects the foreign, analytic nature of the scholar. Thus, in a literary form, Agnon presents epistemological problems which scholars in other cultures are now becoming aware of.[45]

In "Within the Wall" the folklorist is a passive character, unable to understand tradition. In another story "Edo and Enam" Agnon enlarges on his indictment of research. The scholar is represented as a destructive figure, shattering the very culture he tries to understand, salvage, and preserve.

In "Edo and Enam" Agnon has Gabriel Gamzu, one of the central characters, make the following statement:

> "How should he know? If an article of that kind came into my hands by chance, and no-one told me what it was, would I know? Besides, all these scholars are modern men; if you were to reveal the properties of the charms, they would only laugh at you; and if they bought them, it would be as specimens of folklore. Ah, folklore, folklore! Everything which is not material for scientific research they treat as folklore. Have they not made our holy Tôrah into either one or the other? People live out their lives according to Torah, they lay down their lives for the heritage of their fathers; then along come the scientists, and make the Torah into 'research material' and the ways of our fathers into . . . folklore."[46]

The short story of "Edo and Enam" is one of Agnon's most complicated narratives, and it has attracted the attention of many literary critics and interpreters.[47] The main characters are a traditional scholar, Gabriel Gamzu, his wife Gemulah, and a modern scholar, Dr. Ginath. Gamzu visits a Jewish community in an oriental country and marries the leader's daughter, who is a sleepwalker. He brings her to Jerusalem where she cannot find a cure for her sickness. As Dr. Ginath is a scholar of the Edo language and the Enamite Hymns, Gemulah, Gamzu's wife, serves as one of his major informants. However, their relationship is not purely scholarly; Gamzu suspects that his wife's frequent escapes to Dr. Ginath mean that they are having an affair. These relations come to a tragic end when Gemulah climbs on the roof and Dr. Ginath tries to save her; both fall and die as the parapet collapses.

This outline scarcely does justice to the texture of symbols, allusions, and metaphors which fill this short story. Literary critics have tried to decipher the system of symbols and tensions which exist between the narrative personalities, but they tend to ignore the importance of the concept of folklore contained in it. Even those who refer to Agnon's use of folklore see it as an example of academic research in general, rather than as a particular discipline with a value of its own.[48] The emphasis on folklore – it is mentioned five times (six in the original) in one short paragraph, makes it clear that Agnon treats it not as an allegory, but as a dynamic factor in modern life. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the science of folklore emerged as a discipline whose sole purpose was to save dying traditions. From such a perspective, folklore has a central position among the symbols of "Edo and Enam". The death of Gemulah and Dr. Ginath now acquires a tragic-grotesque dimension clearly analogous to the concept of folklore itself. Just as research attempts to save culture and social tradition from destruction, so Dr. Ginath tries to save Gemulah. The death of Dr. Ginath is Agnon's warning to modern society that transforms and trivialises traditions into research objects and collectors' items, depriving them of any social and personal meaning. In modern society both the scholar and his object are doomed.

Gamzu brought Gemulah to Jerusalem, but she could not adjust to modern life. In traditional society her sleepwalking had a social and ritual significance, but in the streets of modern Jerusalem it loses any symbolic value it once had and turns into madness. She deviates from social norms and, hence, the new Israeli society cannot relate to her either.

45. See, for example, Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973).
46. S.Y. Agnon, *Two Tales: Betrothed and Edo and Enam*, trans. Walter Lever (New York, 1966), 210.
47. See, Arnold Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare*, 382-96; Ganuz, note 38; Moked, note 41; Baruch Kurzwell, "Comments on Edo and Enam," *Massekhet ha-Roman* ("On the Novel") (Jerusalem, 1953), 134-54; Israel Rosenberg, *Shay Agnon's World of Mystery and Allegory: An Analysis of "Iddo and Aynam"* (Philadelphia and Ardmore, 1978); Zalman M. Schechter, *"S.J. Agnon's Iddo W'Eynam: A Study of a Myth about Myth and its Symbols,"* Unpublished paper, (Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College, 1966); G. Schaked "S.Y. Agnon – Ido und Enam, Versuch einer Interpretation," *Colloquia Germanica*, 1 (1970), 84-99; Meshulam Tochner, "Pesher Edo and Enam." ("Interpretation of Edo and Enam"), *Pesher Agnon* ("Interpretation of Agnon") (Tel Aviv, 1958), 106-22; Eddy M. Zemach, "The Historiosophic Conception in Two of Agnon's Later Short Stories," *Hasifrut* 1 (1968), 378-85.
48. See, Moked, *op.cit.*, and Tochner, *op.cit.*

Thus her presence in Jerusalem brings destruction upon herself and those who study her. Modern society that tries to analyse its own traditions only condemns itself to cultural sterility.

Agnon emphasises the mutual relationship between the scholar and his research. Objective observation is only an illusion. The contact between them results in mutual destruction. In his interpretation of this short story, Baruch Kurzweil suggests that "Edo and Enam" is the most pessimistic of Agnon's narratives, but he regards it as an erotic tragedy rich in primordial and magic elements.[49] But if the concept of folklore is given a central position in the interpretation, the erotic dimension occupies at most a secondary place. "Edo and Enam" becomes a tragedy not of failure but of success and social prosperity. The basic Zionist idea is redemption of the Jewish exiles and their gathering in Israel, but the very success of this goal brings about the destruction of the redeemed communities. The nihilism in "Edo and Enam" is not so much personal or cosmic as social and historic. The ideal of Zionism could not be achieved without abandoning traditional culture. Collection and analysis is the only salvation, but transformation of cultural items into specimens means fossilisation, and folklorisation of life destroys it.

D) CONCLUSION

Neither Brenner nor Agnon are representative of their respective generations. Each excelled in originality and literary vision far beyond any average author. Their attitudes to folklore do not necessarily reflect the prevailing views of their respective periods. Yet, these expressive fragments, drawn from essays and narratives, demonstrate a radical change in literary attitudes towards the folklore that occurred within the time-span of a single generation. For Brenner, folklore was part of the Zionist ideal, and, in theory, an important element in literary writing. But when this ideal began to take shape in real life, Agnon found not so much newly-formed Hebrew folklore in Israel, as the shattered customs of communities that could not maintain their traditions once they had been uprooted and pitted against the forces of modernity. According to Agnon, folklore, as a science and as an oddity, is a destructive weapon which aids and abets the cultural collapse of tradition. Paradoxically, in modern life rescue brings ruin. The transformation of tradition into a research object preserves it as a physical entity, but devalues it spiritually. History binds society in two ways: traditional society will be destroyed in the process of modernisation in any case, but without its traditional basis modern society itself will collapse.

49. Kurzweil, *op.cit.*